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ABSTRACT

Yalom's group theory and Karenga's Afrocentric paradigm are integrated in a workshop for African American women via the topical themes of each workshop session, the developmental approach from a semistructured group to a process-oriented group, and the process of training a practicum student. A six-week, semi-structured self-esteem workshop was established to address the needs of African American women students (N=8) in a predominately White university. The group had both psychoeducational components and opportunities for processing of reactions. Objectives for members were to develop a healthy self-esteem, explore one's self in relationships, learn to trust other African American women, challenge irrational cultural messages, and to develop strategies to continue strengthening their self-concepts. The demographics of this group, recruitment strategies, developmental collaboration, and feedback from workshop participants are presented. Workshops such as this provide support and multicultural training for students, and professional stimulation and renewal for counselors. Future issues are considered, including establishing practicum guidelines for multicultural experiences, ethnicity of co-leaders, and effective group treatment for African American clients. (Contains 35 references.) (EMK)

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African American Women's Self Esteem Workshop: Yalom Meets Karenga

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Abstract

The presenters will show the integration of Yalom (1985) group theory and Karenga's Afrocentric paradigm (1980) via: the topical themes of each workshop session, the developmental approach from a semi-structured group to a process-oriented group and the process of training a practicum student. The demographics of this group, recruitment strategies, developmental collaboration and feedback from workshop participants will also be presented. Future issues will be considered including establishing practicum guidelines for multicultural experiences, ethnicity of co-leaders, and effective group treatment for African American clients.

African American Women's Self Esteem Workshop: Yalom Meets Karenga

Introduction

The African American woman lives an existence of duality being both African American and female. Her experience is couched within a society of sexism and racism. Effective mental health professionals understand her experience and work to ensure that counseling encourages a positive sense of self rather than embracing stereotypes and myths purported by media and history.

Often African American students are entering an entirely new culture when they attend a predominately white university. They may know few people and may be uncertain how to recreate support networks. Intuitively, an appropriate therapeutic intervention would replicate the "collective" and/or pseudo- extended family such as a supportive therapeutic group.

Merta (1995) commented on the compatibility between African American values (e.g. group identity, interdependence and cooperation) and therapy group interventions. He further stated that homogeneous groups or culture-specific groups have been found to have less conflict and more cohesion, and they provide more rapid relief of symptoms than heterogeneous groups. Nobles (1972) stressed the importance of the African philosophical notion of kinship or collective unity as being an important foundation for African American psychology and mental health intervention.

To address these needs a six-week semi-structured self-esteem workshop for African American women was established utilizing traditional group theory and Afrocentric strategies. While Western culturally based interventions are necessary to provide effective mental health assistance they are often not sufficient when working with African American clients.

Description of the Workshop

The group initially targeted African American undergraduate women, but due to the low response, group facilitators decided to open the group to include graduate women. The response was then overwhelming. The group membership included four undergraduate and four graduate women. They ranged in ages from 21 years old to late 40's. There were two divorcees in the group. Two of the women were single mothers.

The group had both psycho educational components and opportunities for processing of reactions. The structure of the group moved from psycho educational to a more process orientation. This style of group is supported by Merta, (1995) who found that African American clients work better in structured formats rather than in process-oriented groups. The workshop leaders oriented the participants to the group experience by beginning the group with an emphasis on psycho educational presentations. In the third and subsequent sessions more attention was given to facilitation of group members' interactions. This format seemed effective. The psycho educational materials allowed members to gather their thoughts and voices about their experiences related to the session topic. By the third session, the members not only opened up the session with work from previous sessions, but also expressed a need to do more processing in subsequent sessions.

The objectives of the group were for members to develop a healthy self-esteem, explore one's self in relationships, learn to trust other African American women, challenge irrational cultural messages, and to develop strategies to continue to strengthen their self concepts.

The purpose of the content and activities of the workshop was to identify and discuss the experiences of the African American women via psycho educational presentations, biblio therapy,

self-exploration homework, video-therapy, and dialoguing. The group examined and reacted to issues including: skin color, identity as a African American woman, hair, relationships, self-esteem and family, and empowerment. The group examined critical messages received from their families and the community. Group members learned to counter oppressive messages through reality checks and confrontation. For instance, one group member was confronted on her value of chemically straightened hair being more appealing in the workplace than her natural hair. Initially, she became defensive but later thanked the confronting group member for giving her feedback on her internal oppressive message about her hair. In addition to recognizing and countering negative messages, group members learned to internalize positive messages of self-regard. The last session included group members receiving positive feedback from other group members and the leaders.

The varied approaches and structure of this workshop appeared to foster a sense of family in the group. The members voiced a shared sense of sisterhood. Integrating Afrocentric values proved to be worthwhile. Traditional group approaches alone lacks the sensitivity of recognizing the African American woman's experience (Jordan, 1991).

Theoretical Integration

Yalom's instructions about group therapy are comprehensive and vital. In his substantive text, The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy (1985), the power of group process is explained. He outlines eleven "therapeutic factors" and their influence on successful psychotherapy groups. In the development of the self-esteem workshop for African American women, therapeutic factors such as universality, interpersonal learning and instillation of hope were critical. Yet, as noted by Nobles (1972), Asante (1991) and Jordan (1991), issues specific to African Americans must be addressed in the development of psychotherapeutic interventions.

Maulana Karenga utilized the African based value system entitled Nguzo Saba as the foundation for the celebration of Kwanzaa. This system has seven basic principles which are: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith (Collier, A., 1998). Introduction of the Nguzo Saba principles to many African Americans was through the celebration of Kwanzaa . However, the use of this African derived philosophy has expanded and has been utilized in religious teaching, 12-step addiction programs and in career counseling for African Americans (Collier, A., 1998; D'Andrea, M. & Daniels, J., 1992). The developers of this African American Women's Self Esteem Workshop (AAWSEW) recommend using the principles of Nguzo Saba in developing a program that addresses and enhances self-esteem.

In an effort to develop mental health services that are culturally relevant, attention has been directed to the defining of Afrocentric interventions (Dennard, 1998; Grills & Longshore, 1996; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; White, A., Potgieter, C., Strube, M., Fisher, S., Umana-Etefia, 1997). Lee (1990) notes that effective psychotherapeutic interventions for African Americans will incorporate the African American culture. The inclusion of African American culture into mental health treatment reframes negative and deficient promotions into empowering and affirming assets. Components of African American culture, such as harmony among people, appreciation for holistic development, and collective unity, can serve to foster optimal mental health (Nobles, 1972).

Heterogeneity exists within the African American culture and the development of Afrocentric theories must include client and situation-specific considerations (Lee, 1990). Diversity within the African American culture is a salient concern. Yet, development of

psychological interventions which challenge and correct media and historical misinformation about African Americans must be addressed. One way to develop culturally enriched mental health services is through the incorporation of long standing African traditions tied to self-affirmation, reawakening and rebirth of personal beliefs and behaviors (Lee, 1990).

In an effort to respond to the recommendations of researchers prominent in the field of multicultural counseling, the co-leaders of this AAWSEW augmented Yalom's traditional Eurocentric-oriented theory of group psychotherapy by incorporating three of the seven Nguzo Saba principles. The three principles integrated into Yalom's theory were: Umoja (unity), Kujichagalia (self-determination), and Ujima (collective work and responsibility).

According to Yalom universality relates to the awareness that group members find they are not "unique in their wretchedness," (Yalom, 1985, p. 7). Many group members discover by sharing their deepest fears and fantasies that they are not alone. The African American woman not only searches for a sense of oneness but she also seeks a kinship with others who have experienced oppression (both inter-racial and intra-racial). The connectional search for the women in this group specifically related to cultural factors. Early in the first session women were disclosing their fears associated with mistrust of other Black women. To facilitate connectedness, Umoja (unity) was incorporated into the structure of this group. Umoja addresses specifically the need for solidarity and harmony within the African American community (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). This awareness and unification allows African Americans to understand the various social, historical and political influences which contribute to emotional distress.

To encourage the development of Umoja, the group was limited to women who identified as African American. In the first session the purpose of the group was explained which included

giving attention to the similarities of these women. They had both a shared history as Black women in America and as Black women on a predominately white university campus. The group discussed information about the experiences of African American women in the United States and ways in which this cultural history can and often does impact self-identity.

As ground rules were being established during the first session a sense of community began to emerge. Group members attended to issues of childcare and tardiness to sessions. It is interesting to note that being on time was important to the group members but secondary to group members being charged a "no show" fee. Here the development of "we" versus "them" emerged. This sense of cohesion appeared to extend beyond traditional conceptualizations of group cohesion and reflected more the establishment of a cultural kinship for these women on a predominately white university campus.

Another important issue which was allowed to surface in the AAWSEW involved Kujichagalia (self-determination). This principle focuses on self-naming and the encouragement of "persistence, perseverance and determination" to direct one's fate (Collier, A.,1998). Adjustments were made regarding the time of the workshop. The counseling center allowed the group to meet after regular business hours to accommodate the needs and schedules of the participants.

Self-determination also evolved and was encouraged throughout the process of the group. This workshop was topical in nature and each session had a particular focus. However, during the course of the group the topics planned for the workshop were changed as requested by group members. For example, several group members expressed interest in body image issues. When stories were featured in the media that related to their interests, participants brought them up and incorporated their interests into the session. Indeed, members of this group described numerous

instances of personal invalidation as part of their life's experiences. The attention to self-determination offered these women opportunities to reclaim their power and voice.

While encouraging self-determination, the co-leaders maintained the therapeutic integrity of the group. The workshop was scheduled to meet for six-weeks and group members felt strongly that the workshop should continue two additional weeks. This was an issue that was intensely discussed. Evaluation forms completed by workshop participants also echoed their disappointment with the termination at six-weeks. Yalom (1985) describes difficulties groups may face with termination. He notes that avoidance may be a strategy used by groups and it is the role of the therapist to confront the group and encourage the group to determine "how" rather than "when" to conclude the group (p.374). Also, children were not allowed to attend group sessions, although this question was raised.

Yalom described the "corrective recapitulation of the primary family group"(p, 15). This concept refers to the fact that groups resemble families and provides an opportunity for group members to re-live early childhood familial experiences and resolve long standing issues. Certainly, for the majority of women in the group this was a significant factor which they felt contributed to their positive experiences in the group. The age distribution (the ages ranged from twenty-one years old to mid-forties) allowed for generational bridging. Issues discussed included stereotypes and life lessons for both graduate and undergraduate women. However, beyond the establishment of therapeutic recapitulated relationships, evaluations reflected an appreciation for permanent kinships which were established. Thus, this aspect of the group reflects the Nguzo Saba principle of Ujima (collective work and responsibility).

Ujima refers to ways in which "the self is connected with others in terms of meaningful

work towards a common destiny" (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p.333). These women began to identify what type of community they wanted to develop at their university and what they could do to contribute to its development. Several members discussed ways they planned to reach out to friends and trust more, others committed to participating in existing support groups and still others agreed to stay in touch with group members and form a new support network.

Yalom's theory of group therapy is essential to successfully conduct group psychotherapy. To some extent the ethnic or racial make-up of a group does not impact the basic tenets of therapy groups, whether structured or process-oriented. Pre-group screening facilitated by one or both of the co-leaders addressed issues of time commitments, confidentiality, attention to goals and expectations. This pre-group preparation supports Yalom's research that pre-group preparation reduces the "drop-out" (Yalom, 1985). Only one group member failed to complete the workshop. She did not return for the final group session after experiencing a significant emotional incident during the next to last session.

Thus, this workshop represents the successful integration of an empirically-based theory with culturally significant adaptations. These changes respond to the needs of the workshop participants beyond superficial modifications such as having pictures of African American women versus Euro-American women on advertisements. Rather, conceptual changes were made to reflect the needs of these women because of their unique circumstances as African Americans women who are numeric minorities within the society and within their institution of higher learning.

Training

Training graduate students in multicultural counseling is a challenging and difficult task.

According to Merta (1995), there is an over-dependence on providing theory and instruction for working with ethnic minorities in counseling groups and too little experience supervising and facilitating trainees' work with such groups. Researchers and clinical supervisors in the field of counseling have proposed pseudo-experiences such as role plays, participant-observers in informal support groups, and fishbowls activities in the classroom to compensate for the limitation in training programs (Greeley, Garcia, Kessler, & Gilchrest, 1992; Wehrly, 1991). While the value of the aforementioned instructional techniques should not be dismissed, the actual experience of co-facilitating a group comprised of African Americans is a superior model in developing multicultural competency. Hence, when the opportunity arose for the trainee to co-facilitate a group for African American women and to be supervised by an African American female, the training process could not be overlooked.

The supervision process incorporated components of self-awareness, biblio supervision, a developmental approach and a principle of Nguzo Saba. Attention was given to the student's racial identity as an African American woman and she was encouraged to increase her knowledge base about African American women and psychotherapy. According to Greeley, et al. (1992), self-awareness is important because it allows the counselor to become conscious about her own beliefs and values about a group as well as increasing self-efficacy in counseling skills. To promote self-awareness, the supervisor encouraged the trainee to explore her personal issues with hair, skin color, and experiences with other African American women.

Pre-group supervision addressed both interpersonal issues associated with the "hot topics" which would be introduced in the group and the content and structure of the group. The supervisor would ask the trainee thought provoking questions about her own identity as an

African American woman as well as her relationships with the group. The supervisor gave the trainee space to freely speak without fear of being penalized for her values or beliefs. On the other hand, the supervisor challenged the trainee to examine her rationale for certain beliefs and values. This balance of support and challenge facilitated the trainee's self exploration. For example, the trainee became aware that she held some misconceptions about light-skinned African American women. Because of the non-judgmental nature of the supervision, the trainee was able to reflect on her beliefs nondefensively.

Addressing personal issues with a trainee can place the trainee in a vulnerable position. However, the establishment of a safe, trusting supervisory relationship enabled her to recognize that her beliefs could interfere with the development of positive group experience for the participants. Hence, without this self-awareness component, group members could have become targets of misinterpretations (Greeley, et al., 1992). Awareness of the self within the multicultural confines is particularly important in the development of multiculturally competent counselors.

The second component of the training consisted of developing a knowledge base or biblio supervision. According to Greeley, et al. (1992), increasing a counselor's knowledge about groups helps the counselor understand the group. The trainee read numerous articles about African American women and working with African American women in psychotherapy. Supervision time prior to the beginning of the group was spent discussing articles and explaining the rationale for planning group structure as it related to the literature. The trainee was able to apply this knowledge base to the planning and structuring of the group. This experience was very important. It gave the trainee hands-on experience in decision-making and most importantly researching effective culturally relevant treatment. As the research suggests, there are few

opportunities for counselors to experience this type of interactive learning in developing multicultural competency (Greeley, et al., 1992; Merta, 1995).

Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995) report that many traditional models of supervision are biased. Models, such as Hogan (1964) and Stroltenberg (1981), assume that the trainee's counseling skills are deficient and do not take into account trainee's cultural background. Hence, Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995) believe this power difference in the supervision relationship creates conflict and misunderstanding. The implications are resistance and feelings of inadequacy by the trainee and an incompetent view of the trainee by the supervisor.

Models such as Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth (1982) allow for more mutuality in the supervision relationship. These models respect individual differences by meeting the trainee at her skill level. There is a need in the research to examine the influences of supervisor and trainee cultural background in the supervisory relationship. In terms of this workshop, power differences were minimized and a respect for individual differences was evident. For example, the trainee's proposal for the group was addressed respectfully by the counseling center and the potential supervisor. The trainee became the co-planner/designer for this six session workshop.

Initially, the trainee/co-facilitator was hesitant to get involve because of her limited experience in group work. However, with encouragement the trainee progressively became involve in the process of group. Eventually, the trainee led one session alone demonstrating confidence on the part of the trainee and her supervisor. Finally, the mutuality in the relationship extended to the co-facilitators working as co-authors/presenters on a poster presentation. This developmental supervisory relationship respected the trainee's knowledge and was an important part in her growth as a practitioner. Mutuality within the supervisory relationship reflects Ujima.

The supervisor and trainee came together to build and maintain a supportive community (the workshop) and together addressed an issue for (in this case) African American women.

This training opportunity exceeds what most counseling/clinical psychology programs offer trainees towards multicultural expertise. Yet, experiential experiences are critical in developing effective multicultural clinicians.

Special Considerations

Special considerations should be addressed when working with African American women in group psychotherapy.

Title of the Group/Workshop

The group was entitled a "Self-Esteem Workshop for African American Women". The facilitators elected to use workshop over the conventional term of group therapy to draw group members in, to reduce the stigma associated with group therapy, and to identify this group as specifically addressing the concerns of African American women.

Recruitment

The group facilitators used a multicultural approach to forming this group. Conventional approaches such as in-house referrals and distributing fliers were used. However, because few African Americans seek mental health services at white universities' counseling centers the group facilitators also actively advertised the workshop through the campus' Black list-serv, blanketed the campus with flyers, notified faculty in Afro-American Studies Departments, contacted administrators in advocacy roles for African American students and spread the word through the grape vine. This process of collectively working with different offices affiliated with African American students also reflects Ujima. This proactive approach is supported by the literature

because it reaches African Americans who might not otherwise enter therapy (Rollock, Westman, & Johnson, 1992).

Childcare

Jordan (1991) suggests that mental health services provide child-care options. The leaders of the group wanted to have the women with children feel included at the same time alleviate the stressor of trying to be on time because of inadequate babysitting arrangements. The group members decided that one way to do this was to extend the time to begin each session giving the mothers more time to find child care arrangements if the initial one fell short. Interestingly, the mothers of the group did not have to use this feature as did the other members. So, taking time at the onset of the group to discuss child-care accommodations for mothers would help the members feel included and foster a sense of family. As mentioned earlier mothers questioned if they could bring their children to the workshop. Perhaps another option would be to collaborate with students majoring in Early Childhood Development or identifying student organizations interested in a community service project to provide childcare.

Facilitators

The supervisor and trainee for this workshop were African American women. Several group members were also in individual counseling while participating in the workshop. At times group members were in fact referred by non-black therapists. Undoubtedly, African American clients can have solid, effective therapeutic relationships with white counselors. However, for groups or workshop designed to heighten the African American women of her uniqueness and beauty it is recommended that this group be facilitated by an African American woman (Jordan, 1991). Jordan (1991) states that the facilitator's identity should preclude extent of training as a clinician. She

recommends identifying a sensitive woman and training her to facilitate a group. University counseling center without African American counselors are encouraged to consider identifying advanced graduate students or faculty members as potential facilitators.

Conclusion

This workshop was considered successful by many standards. Group membership was maintained with one exception, group members provided positive feedback from their experience and the university counseling center received praised for providing a service that supports the university mission of retention of minority students. It is anticipated that this group will be conducted next year and it is hoped that establishing it as a program offered each spring will contribute to ease of recruitment of members. Consideration is being given to changing the title to "Personal Growth Workshop for African American Women" to move further still from the often stigmatized notion of "self-esteem problems."

African American women face multiple psychosocial stressors because of the variety of "ism" within the American society. Entering predominately white universities can intensify the experience of isolation and oppression. As student services within these institutions begin to address issues of recruitment and retention for this population, programs that provide emotional support and enrichment are important. The historical relationship between African Americans and mental health services has been dismal. Outreach services which address concerns of African Americans in ways which acknowledge, embrace and celebrate their culture can contribute to a change in perceptions of mental health.

Providing quality multicultural training for counselors is also critical to improve

experiences of not only African Americans but also for other ethnic minorities who under utilize mental health services. Training opportunities such as this allows trainees to learn about providing services for these clients which includes administrative, marketing and logistical considerations as well as clinical skills.

Finally, for the African American clinician having the opportunity to mentor and train is renewing. Conducting programs with energized trainees helps motivates supervisors to stay abreast of research, participate in collaborative research and make important contributions in the arena of multicultural counseling.

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Sessions

Six consecutive weeks - 90 minutes each sessions

I. How do I identify myself

II. Hair: What does it mean to me and does it say about me?

III. Skin Deep: The Color Line

IV. Relationships: How they may or may not impact

V. My Self-Esteem and Family of Origin

VI. Feedback & Closure

Session 2: Hair What Does it Mean to Me and What Does it Say about Me?

Description: Thru a psychoeducation presentation (biblio/video therapy) group members examine myths and messages about hair in the Black community.

Objectives:

1) Group members will articulate and disclosetheir own beliefs and experiences about hair.
2) Group members will examine how hair impacts their identity and self-esteem.
3) Biblio- and video-therapy will help members dismiss irrational beliefs about hair.

Session 2: Hair What Does it Mean to Me and What Does it Say about Me? (con't)

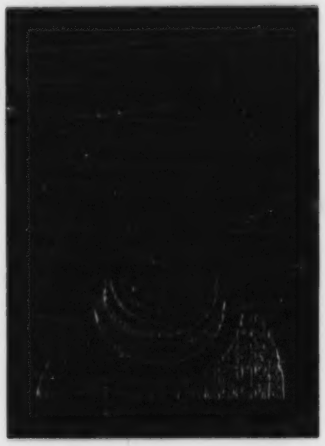
Psychoeducation:

Factual Information taken from Good Hair*

- history of hair in the Black community
- politics of hair
- reasons for hair texture

Video: A Question of Color*- segment

- group members' initial reactions
- identify their own beliefs about hair



Process/Closure

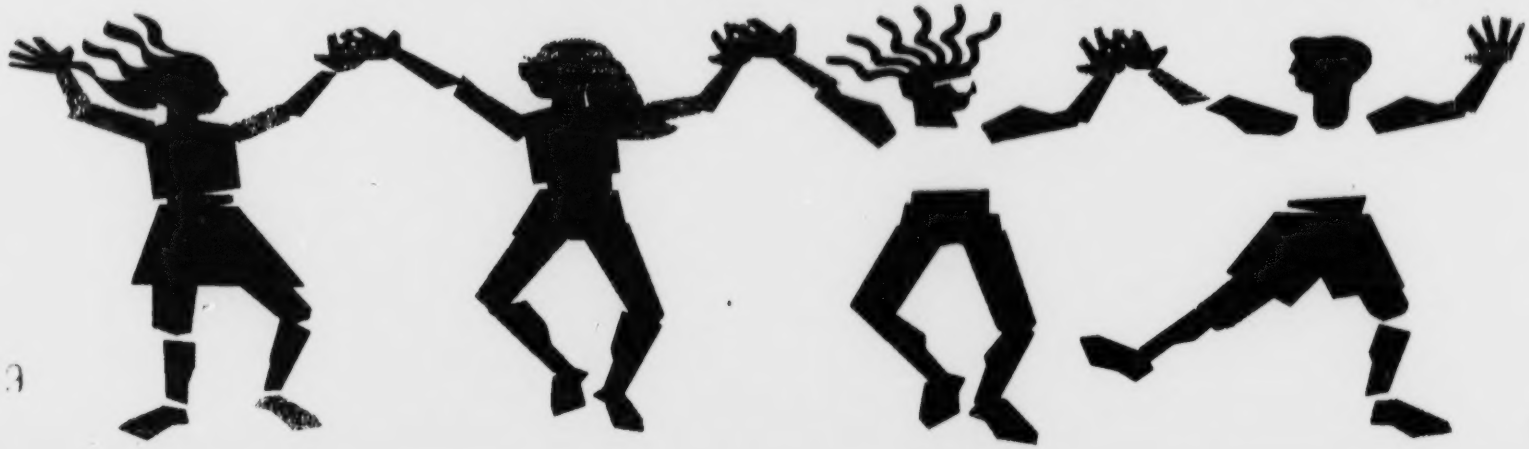
*See Bibliotherapy References

Session 5: My self-esteem & family of origin

Description: Participants were instructed to draw a typical dinner scene from their childhood with their family of origin. They were encouraged to consider location of the meal, seating arrangements and typical conversations.

Objectives:

- Reflect on family dynamics from formative years
- Discuss family issues in non threatening manner
- Access childhood memories via non cognitive strategies



My self-esteem & family of origin (con't)

Supplies:
Large sheets of newsprint
Colored pencils, markers and crayons

Length of activity:
15 minutes for drawing
45 minutes for processing(for group of 8)